

## NAMI's \$68 million dollar plan to solve Alabama's mental health crisis

by Cynthia Gould

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A major push from mental health groups is planned for the upcoming legislative session in February. Lead by NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, advocates are asking the governor and lawmakers to approve \$68 million dollars. They have laid out a strategic plan of action.

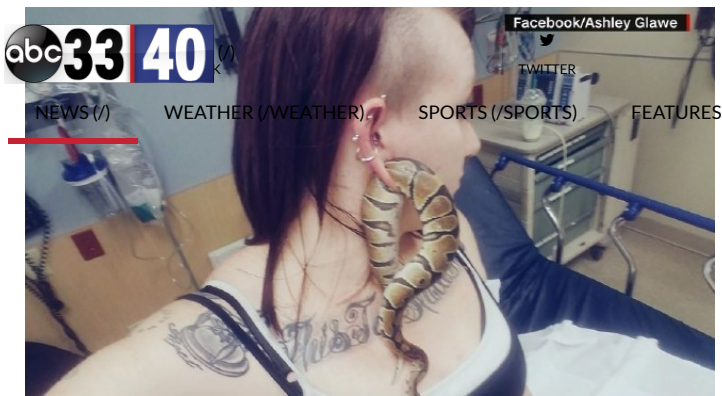
Mental health funding has been slashed over the years. They want the money restored along with mandatory police training and a 24/7 crisis center where law enforcement officers can take those facing a mental issue. All too often they say those in mental distress are taken to jails.

Advocates and experts came together last week at a summit in Hoover. Leaders say since a number of state hospitals were closed, the wait times for psychiatric help has increased dramatically. "It's not right let out fellow citizens suffer in silence; we have to do more," warns Jimmy Walsh, President of NAMI Alabama.

His son is bi-polar and with treatment lives a productive life. "One in five in our community suffer from this; when we ignore it bad things happen," warns Walsh.

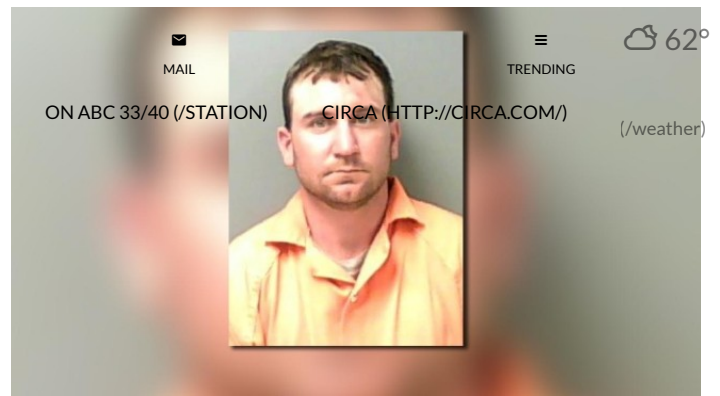
It's estimated 30 percent of inmates in Alabama prisons are mentally ill. "We have too many people in the criminal justice system that

Advocates want the training mandatory in Alabama along with a crisis center to handle evaluations round the clock. "A 24/7 facility where law enforcement could go to leave a person who is sick for assessment, then go back on patrol to save time and effort," explains Susan Baty-Pierce. She remembers years ago when her brother who suffered from schizophrenia was taken to jail because there was nowhere else. "Ever since then I thought there's got to be a better way," she recalls.



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